

واختلاف أصحابي لكم رحمة



DIFFERENCES ARE A BLESSING

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by

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وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ

WA LA-DhIKRU-LLĀHI AKBAR

and the remembrance of Allāh is the greatest!
(Sūrah al-Aʿnākabūt 29:45)



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DIFFERENCES ARE A BLESSING



يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى
وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ؕ
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ؕ

yā ʾayyuha-n-nāsu ʾinnā khalaqānākum miñ dhakarīn wa ʾuñthā
wa jaʿalnākum shuʿubāñw-wa qabāāʾika li-taʿārafū
ʾinna ʾakramākum ʿinda-llāhi ʾatāqākum

“O mankind!

We have indeed created you from one man and one woman,
and have made you into various nations and tribes
so that you may know one another.”

(Sūrah al-Hujjarat 49:13)



‘Abdullāh ؓ narrated in Volume 3, Book 41, Number 593:

“I heard a man reciting a verse (of the Holy Qur’an) but I had heard the Prophet ﷺ reciting it differently. So, I caught hold of the man by the hand and took him to the Prophet ﷺ, who said, “Both of you are right.” Shu’ba ؓ, the sub-narrator, said, “I think he said to them, “Don’t differ, for the nations before you differed and perished (due to their differences).”

Abu Huraira ؓ narrated in Volume 4, Book 54, Number 468:

The Prophet ﷺ, said, “Leave me as I leave you, for the people who were before you were ruined because of their questions and their differences over their prophets. So, if I forbid you to do something, then keep away from it. And if I order you to do something, then do of it as much as you can.”

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. ‘Auf ؓ reported in Book 4, Number 1694:

“I asked ‘A’ishā ؓ, the mother of the believers ؓ, (to tell me) the words with which the Messenger ﷺ commenced the prayer when he got up at night. She said: ‘When he got up at night he would commence his prayer with these words: “O Allāh, Lord of Jibrīl, and Mikā’īl, and Isrā’īl ؑ, Creator of the heavens and the earth, Who knows the unseen and the seen; You decide amongst Your servants concerning their differences. Guide me with Your permission in the differing views (which the people) hold about Truth, for it is You Who guides whom You will to the Straight Path.”’”

Those who think they are qualified to make rulings concerning matters of religious law (*mujtahid*/مجتهد) but in reality are unqualified, when faced by the followers of a one or another school (*madāhib*/مذاهب) of law or *fiqh*, camouflage their deviation by saying “We must follow Qur’ān and Sunnah only, not madhāhib.” They become upset when it is pointed out to them that to follow a madhāhib *is* to follow Qur’ān and Sunnah based on legal decisions made by qualified scholars (‘*ulamā*’/علماء) who have made their informed independent interpretations (‘*ijtihād*’/اجتهاد) precisely on the basis of their extensive knowledge of Qur’ān and Sunnah.

Differences are a Blessing

They ask, “How can it be that the various *madāhib* differ and yet be right at the same time?”

The answer is that one follows the school or ruling that he or she believes is right, but at the same time this does not invalidate the following of other rulings by other *madhāhib*, because they also are based on sound principles of *ijtihād* and because the Prophet ﷺ did not always do things in exactly the same way and different people, saw different things and reported them in different ways, and also understood what he did and said in different ways. Moreover, Allāh ﷻ said things in ways that could lead to different understandings as He ﷻ makes clear in this *āyāt*.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا ؕ
فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ؕ
وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا ؕ
يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا ؕ وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ ؕ

°Inna-llāha lā yastahyī °ańy-taḍriba maṭḥalam

ma ba°uḍatań famā fowqaha

fa°amma-l-ladhīna °āmanū fa ya°lamūna

°annahu-l-ḥaqqu mir -rabbihim

wa°amma-l-ladhīna kafarū

fa-yaqūlūna mādhāā °arāda-llāhu bi-hadhā maṭḥala?

yudillu bihi kathīrańw-wa yahdi bihi kathīrā

wa ma yuḍillu bihī °illa-l-fāsiqīn.

Truly Allāh does not disdain to set forth an example
even of gnat or something bigger.

As for those who believe, they know that the truth is from their Lord.

As for those who cover up the truth, they say,

“What does Allāh want to teach us through this example?”

Thereby He misleads many and thereby He guides many.

Those who are misled are only the deviants (*fāsiqīn*).

(Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:26)

Differences are a Blessing

At this they rebel and begin numbering the mistakes of the true mujtahids: “Imam Ṣhafiؒ was right in this, but he was wrong in that; °Imām °Abu Hanifaؒ was right in this, but he was wrong in that...” They do not even spare the Companionsؓ. But when they are rebuked for this blatant disrespect they become arrogant in their wrong doing,

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْإِثْمِ

wa °idhā qīla lahu-t-taqi-llāha °akhḍathu-l-°izzatu bi-l-°ithmi
and if you tell him to be aware of Allāh he is seized by pride in his sin.
(Sūra al-Baqarah 2:206)

And this is precisely the legacy of the so-called “Salafi” or, more properly and accurately, the Archaic Revivalist or neo-Kḥarijite movement, since, in truth, all Muslims follow the righteous Salaf and we should not accord them a name they neither deserve or observe in reality. (see the addendum to *The House of the Spider*)

We are taught by Allāh ﷻ in the Qur°ān that peace is achieved through tolerance, forgiveness, and responding to evil with good. This is a three-dimensional approach that gives the human being opportunities to exercise increasing spiritual efforts.

The concept of tolerance and acceptance comes into play when one is dealing with the “other”... something or someone different.

Allāh ﷻ offers us clear guidance in this matter:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى
وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا

yāā °ayyuha-n-nasu °inna kḥalāqānākum miñ ḍhakariñw-wa °uñṭha
wa ja°alnakum shu°ūbañw-wa qabāā°ila li-ta°ārafū

“O mankind! We have indeed created you from one man and one woman, and have made you into various nations and tribes so that you may know one another”

(Sūrah al-Ḥujarāt 49:13)

Differences are a Blessing

This verse makes very clear that the diversity in creation is inherent and by Divine Design and that its purpose is to interact, to get to know one another, to learn from one another, to be a part of the global picture. The many different cultures that exist in the world today are a blessing. It is this interaction that allows for increased understanding and enrichment that contributes to the promotion of peace between and within various communities.

Allāh ﷻ has bestowed upon us incessant ease and mercy with differences between sects. The Prophet ﷺ pointed out this fact with his ḥadīth which we will discuss further on;

“The differences in my community are a vast mercy.”

This ḥadīth includes the differences in the methodology of action between sects, as well as covering all the positive differences.

Some statements and words in some verses and ṣaḥīḥ include different judgments. There may be more than one pearl in an oyster. Just like that, mujtahids (مجتهد) – who carry out ṣijtihād (اجتهاد), which, as we mentioned is the act of deducing secondary judgments from the Qur'an and Hadiths by those who are qualified by their knowledge, expressed different views about the pearls in the verses and ṣaḥīḥ. And this led to the opening of different doors. This difference is a source of ease for the ṣummah of the Prophet ﷺ

Allāh ﷻ shows how easy the Shari'ah actually is in His ﷻ saying:

وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ ؕ

wa mā ja'ala 'akaykum fi-d-dīni min ḥaraj

He did not burden you with any hardships in religion.

(Sūrah al-Ḥajj 22:78)

وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ؕ وَلَدَيْنَا كِتَابٌ يَنْطِقُ بِالْحَقِّ ؕ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

wa lā nukallifu nafsān 'illa wus'aha;

wa ladaynā kitabuñ-yañṭiqu bi-l-ḥaqq; wa hum lā yuḍḥlamūn

And on no soul do We place a burden greater than it can bear:

before Us is a Book which clearly shows the truth:

they will never be wronged.

(Sūrah Mu'minūn 23:62)

Differences are a Blessing

For example, the view of ʿImām Shāfiʿi: “The ritual ablution must be refreshed when one touches a woman,” causes hardships in the performance of the Ḥajj because the Hajj must be performed having taken the ablution. In the crowd of millions of people it is difficult to apply this judgment (*ḥukm*), so the followers of this school can perform the Ḥajj by adapting to the rulings of other schools.

Kḥalīfah Ḥarūn Rashīd proposed to ʿImām Mālik رحمته الله: “Let us publish and deliver your books all over the Muslim world, and drive the people to them.” ʿImām Mālik answered, “O Kḥalīfah of the Muslims. It is a blessing upon this community from Allāh ﷻ that the learned have different views. Each one of them sticks to what they see as the truth. All of them are on the right path and each asks for the acceptance of Allāh ﷻ in how they rule and what they do.”

Positive differences took place at the time of the companions of Prophet ﷺ who gave his consent to various kinds of difference. He did not criticize his companions for this kind of disagreement, and saw the judgments of both sides as the truth.

Two companions who went on journey performed their prayers having ritually cleansed themselves using sand, (*tayyamum* / تيمم) which is done only when water is not available, as they could not find water. And while the period of the prayer had not passed, they found water. One of them performed the prayer again; the other did not, as he thought his first prayer was enough. When they are back, they ask the Prophet ﷺ of their situation. The Prophet ﷺ says to the one who did not pray again: “You acted according to the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ,” and to the other: “You deserve twice the reward.”

The hadith: “My companions are like stars, if you obey them you will succeed,” also proves this point.

Based on this, it is clear that anyone can choose to act on the basis of the ruling of the consensually accepted madhhab he wishes.

When a believer prays in a place where he does not know the direction of Makkah, it is accepted of him if he decides to turn to a direction he chooses or turns to different directions for each part of the prayer.

Differences are a Blessing

By this way, Muslims prefer permission to perfection. And this is a great blessing for them. In cases of hardships, Muslims can act according to the permission of another right school in issues that have no solution in their own school, and so avoid undue hardship.

Although the difference between mujtahids is a blessing to the community, it led to the destruction of the former communities. The Prophet ﷺ says in an ḥadīth: “Although differences were suffering to the former communities, they are a blessing to my community.”

In ʾIslām, there is ample room for scholarly interpretation, which is what gave rise to the five schools of jurisprudence and the forty spiritual schools of thought that make up the rich fabric of the Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition. Allāh ﷻ says in Qurʾān

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

lāa ʾikrāha fī-d-dīn

“There is no compulsion in religion.”

(Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:256)

One of the great luminaries of the Islamic intellectual tradition, ʾImām Shafʿī رحمه الله (d. 820c.e.), would say on a given issue: “I am right with the possibility of being wrong, and you are wrong with the possibility of being right.” This is reflective of the attitude that the early community, who lived with the Prophet ﷺ, adopted. It is also the attitude of the later generations who follow in the footsteps of the Prophet ﷺ, when dealing with differences. This is far from the modern-day polemics that people engage in where more attention is paid to “who is right” than to “what is right”.

In recent times, exclusivist discourses have been prevalent among a wide variety of groups (both religious and political) in the Muslim world including the so-called Islamists and neo-Khārijites, who have increasingly, interpreted ʾIslām in exclusivist ways to provide a political ideology on which to base their conception of a modern nation-state. The reasons for the rise of such groups are complex and multi-dimensional but almost always they are political rather than spiritual and almost always they represent someone’s agenda for gaining political control and domination over other Muslims.

Differences are a Blessing

Broadly speaking, these movements are reaction against modernity, westernisation, westintoxication, economic deprivation, global domination by the industrialized powers, and support by such powers for repressive regimes in predominantly Muslim lands.

The failure of borrowed ideologies, such as capitalism, communism, or socialism to deliver economic and social justice in many Muslim countries has created exclusivist groups seeking a ‘pure’ and putative ‘authentic’ language in which to criticize the failing modern Muslim state, a state which has marginalized or displaced traditional religious authorities in a bid to maximize political power. The search for a solution to the political, social, and economic problems confronting Muslims has led these exclusivist groups to use ʿIslām as a political ideology for the state: “*Islam is the solution.*”

Some of you who are listening to this (or reading it) are familiar, however, with my own view that the true Islamic state is a Muslim with his or her head on the ground in *sajdah*.

In any case the zeal of such groups (and disparate others who make the same error like the Vulcans, neo-Cons and Christo-fascists and even, Obama) to understand Islam in a “pure” monolithic form, to engage in revisionist history, and to read religious texts in an exclusivist manner that denies any plurality of interpretations, has created a situation in which any Muslim who dares to disagree or oppose their perspective is immediately branded a kafir. In some cases, the invocation of Islam by the state itself to determine social and legal frameworks has provoked questions about which brand or interpretation of Islam would be used in the process, and whether Islam defines the state or the state defines ʿIslām, such as in Iran or Saudi Arabia or the Somalia of ash-Shābāb or Ṭaliban Afghanistan.

Responding to these and other questions, the Munir Report of 1954, commissioned by the Government of Pakistan after a series of sectarian riots rocked that country, concluded that no two scholars of Islam could even agree on a definition of Islam or on who is Muslim, and with various Shiʿa and Sunni scholars each declaring each other to be *kafir*.

Differences are a Blessing

Of particular significance is the fact that Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān defines the term “muslim” by stressing its literal meaning, “one who submits to Allāh ﷻ,” rather than the more commonly used understanding of the term that narrowly restricts its meaning to indicate religious identity in a sociological sense.

By employing this definition, Allāh ﷻ lays open the possibility of including in the category “muslim” any one who submits to Allāh. In this sense, all who submit to Allāh ﷻ are Muslim. Period.

Such a broad definition is thus an affirmation that there are diverse ways of being muslim in a theological sense. This same inclusive and embracing spirit of the Qurʾān is also reflected in many ḥadīth, of the Prophet ﷺ.

Of particular relevance is the ḥadīth mentioned before, “Difference of opinion in my community is a blessing.” In a similar vein, another ḥadīth condemns intolerance among fellow Muslims: saying “He who calls his brother a kafir is himself a kafir.”

1. al-Hafiz al-Bayhaqi in his book *al-Madkhal* and al-Zarkashi in his *Tadthkirah fi al-ahadith al-mushtaharah* relates:

Imam al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Siddiq ؓ said: “The differences among the Companions ؓ of Muhammad ﷺ, are a mercy for the servants of Allāh ﷻ.”

al-Hafiz al-°Iraqi the teacher of Ibn Hajar al-°Asqalani, said:

“This is a saying of al-Qasim ibn Muḥammad who said: ‘The difference of opinion among the Companions ؓ of Muhammad ﷺ is a mercy.’”

2. al-Hafiz Ibn al-Aṭhīr in the introduction to his *Jamī° al-usul fi ahadith ar-rasul* relates the above saying from °Imām Mālik ؓ according to al-Hafiz Ibn al-Mulaqqin in his *Tuhfat al-muhtaj ila adillat al-Minhaj* and Ibn al-Subki in his *Tabaqat al-Shafi°iyya*.

3. Bayhaqi and Zarkashī also said:

“Qutada said: °Umar ibn °Abd al-°Aziz used to say: “I would dislike it if the Companions ؓ of Muhammad ﷺ did not differ because had they not differed there would be no leeway (for us).”

4. Bayhaqi relates in *al-Madkhal* and Zarkashī in the *Tadhkira*:

“al-Layth ibn Sa‘d said on the authority of Yahya ibn Sa‘id: “The true people of knowledge are the people of flexibility (*tawsi‘a*). Those who give *fatwas* never cease to differ, and so this one permits something while that one forbids it, without one finding fault with the other when he knows of his position.”

5. al-Hafiz al-Sakhawī said in his *Maqasid al-hasana* p. 49 #39 after quoting the above:

“I have read the following written in my shaykh’s (al-Hafiz ibn Hajar) handwriting: “The hadith of Layth is a reference to a very famous ḥadith of the Prophet ﷺ, cited by Ibn al-Hajib in the *Mukhtasar* in the section on *qiyas* (analogy), which says: “Difference of opinion in my Community is a mercy for people” (*‘ikhtilafu ummati rahmatun li-n-nas*).

6. Imam Abu Hanifa said in the shorter version of *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*: “Difference of opinion in the Community is a token of divine mercy.”

7. Ibn Qudama al-Hanbali said in *al-‘Aqa’id*: “The difference in opinion in the Community is a mercy, and their agreement is a proof.”

8. al-Shatibi in *Kitab al-i’tisam* said: “A large group of the Salaf deemed the differences of the Community in the branches of the Law to be one of the paths of Allāh’s mercy...”

That difference is a mercy is what is narrated from a slightly different perspective in al-Qasim ibn Muhammad (ibn Abi Bakr al-Siddiq)’s words: “Allāh ﷻ has made us gain through the differences among the Companions ﷺ of the Prophet ﷺ of Allāh ﷻ in their practice.” No one practices according to the practice of one of them except he (al-Qasim) considered it to be within the fold of correctness.

Dumra ibn Raja’ narrated: “‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz and al-Qasim ibn Muḥammad met and began to review various ‘aḥādīth. ‘Umar then began to mention things which differed from what al-Qasim

mentioned, and al-Qasim would give him trouble regarding it until the matter became clearer. ʿUmar said to him: “Don't do that! (i.e. don't question the difference.) I dislike stripping the favors (of Allāh ﷻ) from their differences.”

Ibn Wahb also narrated from al-Qasim that he said: “I was pleased by the saying of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz: I would dislike it if the Companions ﷺ of Muhammad ﷺ did not differ among them, because if there were only one view then the people would be in difficulty. Verily the Companions ﷺ are Imams which one uses for guidance (ʿinnahum aʿimmatun yuqtada bihim). If someone follows the saying of one of them, that is Sunnah.”

The meaning of this is that the Companions ﷺ opened wide for people the doors of scholarly striving (ʿijtihād) and of permissibility of difference in striving. If they had not opened it, the *mujtahids* would be in a bind, because the extent of ʿijtihād and that of opinions do not entirely agree: the people who exert striving would then, despite their obligation to follow what they are convinced of, be obliged to follow what differs with them, and this is a kind of unbearable legal obligation and one of the greatest binds.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr said in *Jamīʿ bayān al-ʿilm*:

“The ʿulamāʾ are in agreement that it is permissible, for whoever looks into the differing opinions of the Prophet's Companions, to follow the position of whomever he likes among them.

“The same holds true for whoever looks into the positions of the ʿImāms other than the Companions, as long as he does not know that he has erred by contradicting the text of the Qurʾān or Sunnah or the Consensus (ijmāʿ/إجماع) of the scholars, in which case he cannot follow the above position.

“However, if this contradiction is not clear to him in any of the three respects mentioned, then it is permissible for him to follow the saying in question even if he does not know whether it is right or wrong, for he is in the realm of the common people (*al-ʿamma*) for whom it is permissible to imitate the scholar upon asking him something, even without knowing the bases of the answer...”

Differences are a Blessing

Al-°Uqayli mentioned that Muhammad ibn °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sayrafī said: “I asked Aḥmad ibn Hanbal: ‘If the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ differed regarding a certain question, is it permissible for us to check their positions to see who among them is right so that we may follow him?’ He replied: “It is not permissible to check on the Companions ﷺ of the Prophet ﷺ (*la yajuz alnazar bayna ashabi rasulillah*).’ I said: ‘Then what is the procedure in this?’ He replied: ‘You follow whichever of them you like.’”

Allāh ﷻ and the Prophet ﷺ therefore gave the °Ummah generous leeway in the existence of disagreement in the branches of the law among them.

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۖ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ
إِلَّا مَن رَّحِمَ رَبُّكَ ۚ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ ۚ

wa low shā°a rabbuka la-ja°ala-n-nāsa °ummatiñw-waḥidatāñ
wa lā yazālūna mukhtalfīna
°illa mar-rahīma rabbuka : wa li-dḥalika kḥalaqahum

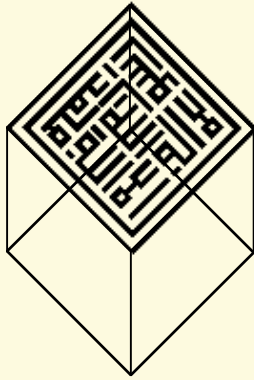
And if your Lord willed
He would have made the people one [single] community,
but they do not cease to differ [in their beliefs]
save the ones upon whom your Lord has mercy
and [for that reason] He created them.
(Sūrah Hūd 11:118-119)

This is the door that Allāh ﷻ opened for the °Ummah to enter into this mercy, for what else is meant in the verses in Sūrah Hūd above other than “ save the ones upon whom your Lord has mercy and [for that reason] He created them.”.

Therefore, the differences in the branches of the Law are like their agreement in them in that both, agreement and disagreement, are in reality mercy and truly the differences in them are a blessing for us and all praise belongs to Allah ﷻ



wa-llāhu °alim



noon hierographers
green mountain
virginia
usa